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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 OTTAWA 000632

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [CA](#)

SUBJECT: PREPARING FOR AN ELECTION THAT JUST WON'T COME

REF: A. OTTAWA 452

[1](#)B. OTTAWA 305

[1](#)C. OTTAWA 529

Classified By: PolMinCouns Scott Bellard, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. While the chances for a spring or summer election remain almost zero, the Conservatives seem fully prepared to start their next campaign at a moment's notice. The Liberals admit to more dire funding problems, and have launched a new fundraising drive. A fall 2008 election remains possible, but so does a wait until the next fixed election of October 19, 2009. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) National Campaign Director Doug Finley of the ruling Conservative Party gave poloffs a personal tour of the party's campaign "war room" headquarters on May 5. The state-of-the-art facility -- which the media has dubbed "the fear factory" -- occupies an entire floor of an office building in suburban Ottawa, and has been sitting in readiness for a federal election campaign for almost two years. (The Conservatives just had to sign a new lease.) Its downstairs neighbor is Canadian Blood Services, which Finley fully expects will lead to many campaign jokes and jibes. Finley admitted that the Conservatives had actually expected an election sometime in 2007, but had drastically underestimated the Liberals' unwillingness to face the voters yet (ref a), in part due to their inadequate funding and in part due to likely unfavorable comparisons between Conservative leader Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Liberal leader Stephane Dion.

[1](#)3. (C) The key themes of the next Conservative campaign will be "Leadership" and "We get things done," Finley confirmed. The party has already prepared its campaign slogans, posters, and ads, which are ready to deploy immediately once the government falls -- if it does -- anytime before the fixed next election date of October 19, [1](#)2009. (Note Under Conservative legislation that Parliament passed in May 2006, federal elections will hereafter take place at four year intervals, unless a government loses a vote of no confidence in the House of Commons, in which case elections may take immediately. If the Conservatives survive until October 2009, this would be the first use of this legislation. End note) Finley noted that party officials would have to re-work these if the government survives through the fall of 2008, which he said remains a real possibility. He admitted that the new campaign photos of Prime Minister Harper are already dated -- Harper subsequently lost an estimated 40 pounds -- but said that most shots were deliberately from the waist up, anyway. Not only are the Conservatives' television ads ready, but they have even produced mock Liberal attack ads (some of which he aired for us) in order to help Conservative strategists brainstorm, anticipate, and counter expected Liberal attack lines. The campaign headquarters -- for the first time -- has its own television studio for regular press briefings and conferences, so that the party will not have to beg space elsewhere or depend on the national media (especially CBC), which the Conservatives believe is usually biased toward the

left, according to Finley. It will also enable the party to feed directly into local media markets and fine-tune regional messages to target audiences.

¶4. (C) Finley said that the party expected to put the Prime Minister on the road for up to 80 pct of the campaign, which will probably run no more than the legal minimum of 36 days (ref b). He has already worked out the detailed schedule, which will involve 3-5 stops in different media markets each day, unlike in the 2006 race. Ottawa area Cabinet members will do most of the press events at the war room, in addition to campaigning in their own ridings, he added.

¶5. (C) About 150 people -- including government officials on leaves of absence from the Prime Minister's Office, staff from MPs' offices, and party workers -- will staff the "war room" when in use. The desks and chairs, phone lines, computers, and kitchen (there will be three free meals available daily) are all in place; Finley claimed that the facility could be fully operational within six hours of the "dropping of the writ" announcing a new federal election. A special "rapid response" unit will handle the burning issues of each day, while another will focus exclusively on Quebec. Borrowing from U.S. election campaigns, the Conservatives have honed their ability to target specific audiences with customized campaign literature; Finley claimed that the Conservatives are now unmatched among Canadian political parties in sophisticated voter-profiling techniques. He volunteered that there had been a Conservative "mole" in the 2006 Liberal campaign headquarters (so that the Conservatives were able to release the Liberal platform to the press, with comments, before the Liberals even published it), but

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declined to confirm that this would be true in the next election (while leaving little doubt it would).

¶6. (C) The Liberal Party on May 6 launched a new fundraising appeal for its "Victory Fund," explicitly admitting that the Conservatives had "raised almost four times as much as the Liberal Party in 2007." It asked for contributions as minimal as C\$10 per month, highlighting that -- with tax credits -- this boiled down to only \$2.50 per month. In contrast, Finley said that he could pick up the phone and within minutes raise hundreds of thousands of dollars, underscoring what he described as the ludicrousness of the "in-and-out scandal" relating to about \$1.2 million in disputed spending on the 2006 Conservative campaign (ref c). He pointed to election-related spending caps, and admitted that the party was trying to front-load as many expenses as possible before an election, tapping into its apparently rich war chest.

¶7. (C) Comment: Virtually no one predicts a spring or summer 2008 election any more, so the Conservatives' "war room" will continue to remain in empty readiness for at least many more months to come. (Poloffs have requested a similar tour of the Liberal Party's "war room," but there does not appear to be one, yet.) Doubts remain whether the Liberals will be ready to force an election even in fall 2008, nor do there appear yet to be any genuine issues that they could usefully seize upon to bring down the government at that point, having acquiesced in recent months on key votes on the budget, the comprehensive crime bill, and the extension of the Afghan mission of the Canadian Forces. There are nonetheless some within the Liberal caucus who likely continue to itch to topple the Conservatives and at least attempt to win enough seats to form a Liberal government -- even a minority one -- but so far more cautious heads still prevail. It remains entirely within the realm of possibility that, if the Conservatives can survive fall 2008, the Liberals may just wait until the 2009 fixed election date to face the voters. In the meantime, the Conservatives continue to push forward on their legislative agenda, acting for all intents and purposes as if they had a majority in the House

of Commons. The very existence of the war room reinforces the perception that the Conservatives are ready and eager for an election, not only bolstering intra-party confidence but also probably scaring the Liberals enough to keep them from voting down the government, for now.

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